

W/C
27 February 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Appraisal of its Strategic Position Prior to the Current Offensive

1. CIA has reviewed key Communist documents captured in Vietnam in order to bring into sharper focus Hanoi's own appraisal of its strategic position prior to the Tet offensive. One North Vietnamese document used for indoctrination of middle-level cadre seems to us to spell out Hanoi's arguments in particularly clear and explicit terms. This document, entitled "Clearly Understand the New Situation and Mission," was captured in late November but was not available in Washington until the end of January.

2. The North Vietnamese assessment has the ring of authority. Issued on 1 September for indoctrination purposes, it was drawn from an analysis prepared by a high-level party committee in Hanoi. The document reviews the development of the war from the summer of 1965, when US forces were introduced on a large scale, through each campaign season to the summer of 1967. Each stage of the struggle is represented in terms of Communist gains and allied reverses. Hanoi sees every step in the strengthening of US forces as a vindication of Communist strategy, and points to its success in keeping pace with the buildup.

3. Hanoi argues in this analysis that it has brought the conflict to a new stage, not because its "protracted war" strategy has failed but because it has succeeded. The introduction of the document describes in plain terms the opportunities now open to the Communists: "the immediate situation becomes increasingly more favorable for us and detrimental to the enemy." This will enable the revolutionary movement in the South to "secure

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great victories in a rather short period of time." These victories will entail the destruction of a "large part of the US combat forces" and the "main body of the Puppet Army."

4. Hanoi's confident assessment of the strength of its position clearly is central to its strategic thinking. Just as it provided the rationale for the Communists' "winter-spring campaign," it probably will also govern the North Vietnamese response to the present tactical situation. If Hanoi believes it is operating from a position of strength, as this analysis suggests, it can be expected to press its military offensive--even at the cost of serious setbacks. Given their view of the strategic balance, it seems doubtful that the Communists would be inclined to settle for limited military gains intended merely to improve their bargaining position in negotiations.

5. A few excerpts from the North Vietnamese document show how the Communists arrive at their conclusion that the time has come for "a great step forward" on the way to "complete victory."

"In the winter-spring of 1965 and 1966, after pouring more than 200,000 US and Allied troops into SVN to join more than a half million puppet troops, the US imperialists launched their plans of strategic counteroffensive in the dry season, hoping to destroy a large part of our main body, disperse our troops, destroy the revolutionary organizations in our military installations, suppress the struggle of our people, wipe out the party forces and guerrilla forces, occupy our land, and reduce our area. Concurrently, they reinforced their air force and escalated the war in the North, hoping to prevent us from reinforcing the South.... They could not destroy any element of our forces and they were badly worn down...."

"In the rainy season of 1966, the enemy did not have enough strength to launch great attacks against us....they were actively preparing to reopen greater strategic counteroffensive phases with larger forces in the coming dry season."

"In the dry season of 1966-1967, with an increased US force of more than 400,000 troops or more than one million including the Allied forces and the puppet troops, using modern weapons, aircraft, artillery, and mechanized means which had been increased four or five fold, the US imperialists launched a much fiercer counteroffensive phase than they had launched previously. They applied the tactics of "pincers" to seek and destroy our main force and concurrently launch raids to pacify and herd the people, hoping that they would be able to regain the initiative on the battlefield and avoid great defeats. They deployed all their forces and launched dozens of operations at a time, ranging from regimental level to army corps level on all battlefields. The most important of these operations was OPERATION JUNCTION CITY, in which they committed 45,000 of their troops against the northern part of Tay Ninh. They had concurrently pushed forward their pacification plan and stepped up their psywar and Open Arms activities... In the North, they increased the rate of destruction to a high degree and on a broader range...."

"They failed to achieve their goal of destroying us and they suffered an unprecedentedly high number of casualties and material losses. They boasted that with their great strength and their numerous weapons, aircraft, tanks and bombs, they would surely wipe out all our main units and installations. But our main installations remain intact, our armed forces continue to develop, and our rear bases and installations continued to fill the requirements for fighting the enemy. More importantly, we have also opened many special fronts and battlefields, especially the Tri Thien //DMZ// battlefields, in which we have destroyed many of the enemy. We have attracted the enemy toward such battlefields and caused confusion to them

as well as prevented them from implementing their plans of bringing US troops to the Mekong Delta..."

"Their pacification plan, a program highly boasted by the US imperialists and puppet regime and carried out at the expense of 90 percent of the puppet forces with the assistance of the US imperialists, has also proven to be a failure. They themselves recognize their pacification failure. They are suffering political failure and they are striving to consolidate and stabilize the puppet army and regime, but these deteriorate steadily. Puppet troops have been degenerated from organic mobile soldiers to pacification and defensive troops. They have proved to be inefficient, have demonstrated pronounced defeatism and are continuing to disintegrate..."

"In the North, they have stepped up their destructive activities through intense deployment of their air force and navy. They have launched fierce operations, hoping to be able to scare our people and prevent us from reinforcing our brothers in the South. However, we remain unshakable in our determination. On the contrary, we have fought bravely and destroyed more than 2,000 of their aircraft, and right now we are standing side by side with the people in the South and are doing our best to support their revolution and to liberate the South...."

"In spite of the cunning plots of the US imperialists and their cruel henchmen, and in spite of their mammoth strength, their great firepower, and all their superior war means, the strategic objectives which had been selected by them could not be achieved. The defeats they are suffering become more burdensome and occur more frequently...."

"On our side...even though we have met a certain number of great difficulties...

we have caused the first phase of the greatest limited war ever waged by the US imperialists to fail...."

"At present, the situation has developed in such a way that it is very favorable for us and a critical deadlock for the enemy. After the failure of two major strategic counteroffensive campaigns, the leaders in the United States have become pessimistic over their war escalation policy in South Vietnam. The increase of combat troops in SVN met with many difficulties...."

"This is a perfect opportunity for us to emphasize attacking the enemy in all fields and taking advantage of the victories to push the SVN Revolution a great step forward....In this historical period, if our entire party, army, and population will fully understand the situation and rush forward to fight without fear of hardship and sacrifice, then we will certainly be able to bring about a turning point in our confrontation with the enemy and also cause the US limited war policy to be a failure which can no longer be carried out. From that situation, we can proceed toward realizing our immediate objective and secure a complete victory."